

METHOD OF DIAGNOSING A VEHICLE ENGINE COOLING SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a method of diagnosing a vehicle
5 engine cooling system.

Description of the Related Art

Vehicle engine cooling systems are known in which a stream of fluid (normally water) is fed to the inlet of a radiator connected to one or more cooling fans, which direct a stream of air through the radiator to produce an outward heat exchange, so that the water at the outlet of the radiator is cooler than at the inlet. As is known, due to aging and wear of the radiator and/or members producing forced flow of the water, the efficiency of the engine cooling system decreases considerably, and therefore also the difference between the temperature of the water at the inlet and outlet.

15 A need therefore exists for a method of fully automatically determining such a situation, and of also determining gradual decline of the engine cooling system to predict pending malfunction of the system well in advance.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the present invention, there is provided a method of
20 diagnosing a cooling system of a vehicle engine, characterized by comprising the steps of: acquiring operating data relative to operation of the cooling system between turn-on of the engine and subsequent turn-off of the engine; processing the acquired operating data and accumulating the data to create at least one database; and examining the location of the data within said database to

determine malfunction and/or potential malfunction situations of said cooling system.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A preferred, non-limiting embodiment of the invention will be
5 described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 shows the operations performed in the method according to the present invention;

10 Figure 2 shows a first database employed in the method according to the present invention;

Figure 3 shows a variation of the method according to the present invention;

Figure 4 shows a second database employed in the method according to the present invention.

15 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Figure 1 shows the operations performed in a first embodiment of the method, according to the present invention, of diagnosing the cooling system of a vehicle engine, in particular of an industrial vehicle.

To begin with, a block 100 determines whether the engine relative to
20 the cooling system is on; if it is not (engine off), block 100 remains on standby; otherwise (engine on), block 100 goes on to a block 110.

Block 110 acquires and stores the temperature T_{in} of the water supplied to the cooling system radiator inlet, and the temperature T_{out} of the water at the cooling system radiator outlet.

25 Block 110 is followed by a block 120, which calculates and stores the temperature difference ΔT between the water temperature T_{in} at the radiator inlet and the water temperature T_{out} at the radiator outlet, i.e.:

$$\Delta T = T_{in} - T_{out}$$

Block 120 is followed by a block 125, which forms a data structure defining and storing operating states $S(\Delta T, T_{in})$ of the radiator as a function of the calculated ΔT value and the inlet water temperature T_{in} .

5 The data structure also stores the time lapse T_s the cooling system remains in each operating state $S(\Delta T, T_{in})$.

For example, the database can be represented in a cartesian X, Y plane by a spot graph – Figure 2 – in which each spot corresponds to a state, and the diameter of the spot shows how long the operating state is detected, *i.e.*, the
10 time lapse the cooling system remains in that particular operating state.

Block 125 is followed by a block 130, which determines whether the vehicle engine is off; if it is not (engine on and running), block 130 goes back to block 110; otherwise (engine off and not running), block 130 is followed by a diagnosis block 170.

15 At the output of block 130, the total trip time T_{trip} (measured in seconds, minutes, or hours) between turning the engine on and off is also calculated, and equals the sum of the lapse times within the various detected operating states.

Blocks 100-130 thus determine the water temperature at the radiator
20 inlet and outlet at successive instants, and calculate, for each finding, the temperature difference ΔT introduced by the radiator. Preferably, though not necessarily, blocks 100-130 are scanned so that temperatures T_{in}, T_{out} are determined and temperature difference ΔT calculated at predetermined time intervals, *e.g.*, of one second.

25 It is known, in fact, that, when operating poorly or not at all, the radiator produces only a small reduction in the temperature of the fluid supplied to the inlet, *i.e.*, temperature difference ΔT is close to zero or at least lower than normal operating values.

The operating states are thus stored and accumulated in different operating condition areas (shown by the grid in Figure 2).

Alternatively, the operating states may be stored in the data structure as a function of the calculated ΔT value and the outlet water temperature T_{out} .

5 Alternatively or in addition, as opposed to the time lapse in each operating state, the time lapse in each state as a percentage of total trip time T_{trip} may be stored.

At the end of each vehicle trip, *i.e.*, when the engine is turned off, the three-dimensional data structure therefore contains the time lapses in the various
10 detected operating states.

Repeated vehicle trips result in the generation of a database containing all the states in which the radiator has operated.

According to the present invention, block 170 periodically checks the database containing all the accumulated data structures to determine any
15 malfunction situations.

For which purpose, the X, Y plane map (Figure 2) shows a number of calibratable areas, including:

- a danger area Z1;
- a prealarm area Z2; and
- 20 • a normal or safe operating area Z3.

Areas Z1, Z2 and Z3 in the X,Y plane can be calibrated as a function of the type of trip and the characteristics of the vehicle.

The check by block 170 can be made in three ways:

- by checking the data structure at the end of each trip of each vehicle to
25 determine instantaneous malfunctions (*e.g.*, at least one operating state in danger area Z1);
- by checking the data structures of a number of trips of each vehicle to determine decline situations (*e.g.*, migration of accumulated operating states from normal operating area Z3 to areas Z1 and Z2; and

- comparing the data structures of different vehicles to determine anomalies of one vehicle with respect to the rest of the fleet (e.g., a mean concentration of fleet radiator operating conditions in a normal operating sub-area, and individual vehicle operating conditions concentrated in a different normal operating sub-area).

5 Malfunctioning of the radiator may be determined on the basis of a number of criteria, including:

- an operating state within danger area Z1 over and above a given maximum time lapse, *i.e.*, malfunctioning is determined when the 10 temperature difference produced by the radiator remains small for a long total period of time and for numerous vehicle trips;
- migration of the time lapse values in various operating states towards danger area Z1, *i.e.*, the temperature difference decreases with time as the radiator gradually declines;
- an operating state distribution differing from that of the other vehicles in 15 the fleet.

In the Figure 3 method, a first block 200 determines whether the engine relative to the cooling system is on; if it is not (engine off), block 200 remains on standby; otherwise (engine on), block 200 goes on to a block 210.

20 Block 210 acquires and stores the rotation speed ω_v of the cooling system radiator fan.

Block 210 is followed by a block 230, which determines whether the vehicle engine is off; if it is not (engine on and running), block 230 goes back to block 210; otherwise (engine off and not running), block 230 is followed by a block 25 240.

At the output of block 230, the total trip time T_{trip} (measured in seconds, minutes, or hours) between turning the engine on and off is also calculated.

Blocks 200-230 thus determine fan rotation speed at successive instants, to obtain n speed samples. Preferably, though not necessarily, blocks 200-230 are scanned so that fan rotation speed is determined at predetermined time intervals, e.g., of one second, during trip time T_{trip} .

5 Block 240 calculates the mean fan rotation speed value ω_{v_med} , i.e.

$$\underline{\omega_{v_med} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{i=n} \omega_{vi}}{n}}$$

where n is the number of speed samples acquired repetitively by blocks 200-230 within the trip time.

Block 240 is followed by a block 250, which calculates the fan

10 rotation speed variance σ^2 :

$$\sigma^2 = \frac{\left[\sum (\omega_{vi} - \omega_{v_med})^2 \right]}{n}$$

where n is the number of speed samples acquired repetitively by blocks 200-230 within the trip time.

Block 250 is followed by a block 260, which stores the calculated

15 mean speed and variance values in respective databases.

At the end of each vehicle trip, i.e., when the engine is turned off, the database is therefore updated to accumulate the calculated mean speed and variance values of the concluded trip.

Repeated vehicle trips result in the generation of a database

20 containing a mean speed value for each trip, and a database containing a variance value for each trip.

Figure 4 shows an example of a database showing mean speed values accumulated over successive trips.

According to the present invention, a process, independent of the

25 operations in blocks 200-260 and indicated by block 270 in Figure 3, periodically checks one or both databases to determine any malfunction situations.

Malfunctioning of the radiator may be determined on the basis of a number of criteria, including:

- mean speed and/or variance values exceeding prealarm and alarm (minimum or maximum) values;

5 • a check of the development over time of the mean speed and/or variance values to determine migration towards prealarm and alarm values.

The prealarm and alarm values can be calibrated.

The method according to the present invention therefore provides for fully automatically determining a malfunction situation of the engine cooling

10 system.

Moreover, the method also determines gradual deterioration of the engine cooling system to predict malfunctioning of the system.